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JORDAN - ARAB STATES: The assassination of Jordanian Premier Wasfi Tal in Cairo has stirred up a new storm in the already troubled Arab atmosphere.

Tal, who had been opposed by Palestinian groups since his appointment in October 1970, was one of the executors of King Husayn's mopping-up campaign against the fedayeen. The assailants may be associated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, whose radical goals include the elimination of the present Jordanian administration.

Tal was in Cairo for meetings of the Arab Defense Council, where he presumably presented the Jordanian side in discussions of the problems of the fedayeen. Mediation efforts sponsored by the Saudis and Egyptians had broken down on Friday, with each side again blaming the other's intransigence for the failure to reach any agreement. The sponsors and the Syrians had urged an accommodation before the convening of the Defense Council.

In Jordan, the immediate effect of the assassination will be to stifle any lingering sentiment for accommodation with the fedayeen. There will probably be an intensified campaign to identify and round up Palestinian agents

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Tal's rivals and detractors who have been urging the appointment of a more moderate premier will have to lie low lest they be implicated in his death. In any case the next premier is not likely to be chosen for his pro-Palestinian sentiments.

Although Egypt probably was not officially involved in the slaying, Cairo may be criticized by Amman because of its well-known coolness to Tal, which dates from Tal's outspoken opposition to President Nasir in the early 1950s.

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The assassination will do little to forward Egyptian hopes for a united Arab stand against Israel. President Sadat had been using the series of Arab ministerial meetings to seek a common Arab position in the debate on the Middle East question, which is expected to take place in the UN General Assembly in the coming weeks.



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SOUTHEAST ASIA: The recently concluded meeting of the foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) represents an important step forward for the organization, although its impact will not be great over the short term.

The meeting was largely devoted to the future of Southeast Asia and to the suitability of neutralization as a way of guaranteeing the region's security. As anticipated, Malaysia, the leading exponent of neutralization, was unable to win the support of ASEAN's other members--Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines--for more than a broadly worded declaration expressing the foreign ministers' determination to exert "initially necessary" efforts to further neutralization as a desirable future objective for the region. The misgivings of the Philippines and Thailand, anxious to protect bilateral agreements with the US, and Indonesia, which desires to keep the US involved in the region, were instrumental in holding the line against Kuala Lumpur's efforts to get a more far-reaching specific declaration.

Although the foreign ministers are now on record as favoring the neutralization concept, concluding statements made it clear that the participants share considerable skepticism about its implementation.

In the meantime, a committee has been appointed to explore the practical problems of neutrality, particularly the selling of the idea to Southeast Asian nations which are not members of ASEAN. Malaysia will push for more concrete steps at an ASEAN "summit" meeting scheduled for Manila next March. The future of the neutralization idea itself will depend largely on the attitudes of the US and the major powers in Asia. It may turn out that the most important effect of Malaysia's effort will be to breathe new life into ASEAN and encourage the countries in the region to think more systematically and realistically about the future.

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NOTE

YUGOSLAVIA: Yugoslavia froze prices of all products and services on 26 November for a period not to extend beyond next February. After a two-day debate, the Federal Executive Council decided that rapidly increasing prices (14 percent thus far in 1971) and continued inflationary pressures necessitated this move. The freeze is expected to protect the economic stabilization program and the standard of living of the Yugoslav consumer. Meanwhile, to implement the stabilization program, the government is preparing other legislation such as modifications of wage policy and of the foreign trade and foreign exchange systems.

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